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PCs put video production at your fingertips

E-BIZ

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A seismic shift is occurring in the world of video production that promises to give small business the ability to create and distribute quality video presentations at a low cost.

Video is one of the most effective tools used by big business. You'll often find large organizations distributing marketing, promotional, training or support videos on VHS tapes. Unfortunately for small business, the cost to assemble such a package has long been out of reach.

That is, until now. During the past few months, I've immersed myself in digital video editing technology and in doing so, have managed to create a promotional video for a relatively small investment.

The premise of digital or personal computer-based video editing is simple. First, you need some video material to work with, from VHS tapes or from a camcorder, for example. You then transfer selected portions of that material into your computer, using a video capture/playback card, a technology that is proving to be one of the hottest sectors in the computer industry. Once you have captured a variety of video sequences or "clips" into your PC, you can use sophisticated editing software to assemble them into a desired sequence. Add a few special effects, titles and a soundtrack, and you'll have a reasonable quality video for a fraction of the cost of a professional production.

Why should a small business explore this path? Video has perhaps the greatest potential when it comes to marketing, promotion and support of small business. If you distribute a product that involves some tricky installation issues, an accompanying video might help to reduce support costs. Or if you sell something that is visually oriented, video is the perfect marketing vehicle.

It would have cost at least $10,000 to have a professional production company create the type of video I needed. But since I often look for a technological solution to a problem, the time seemed ripe to create my own video on using a computer.

I obtained a video capture/editing card from **Matrox Graphics Inc.**, a private Montreal-based company in the forefront of the video editing revolution. The package included a sophisticated video editing program. In essence, for the cost of a few hundred dollars, I was able to obtain the means to transfer various video clips to PC and assemble them in a way that told a story. I added a variety of special effects and then played it back to a VCR with almost no loss in the quality of the image.

The 20-minute production can now be distributed on a VHS tape or CD-ROM for a cost of less than $2 apiece. Not only that, but I've added the video to my Web site, letting me distribute it for free, a sum that brings cries of joy to my small business heart. I saved money, mastered a new skill and have another effective means of promoting my small business activities.

There are a few caveats with this new technology. Video production uses huge amounts of computer storage, so you'll have to be prepared to add to your hard drive capacity. The technology is still maturing, so you might find some frustrations along the way. The speed of your computer is critical as well, since digital video editing is a complex computer application.

Finally, the world of video production on a PC will mirror the experience that many people have had with desktop publishing. You might be able to produce your own video, but you won't necessarily have the artistic and creative skills that professionals have. You may discover that you really do need an expert.

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